

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

PHALAROPES IN COASTAL KENYA Phalaropes *Phalaropus* sp. are reported by fishing enthusiasts from various localities between Shimoni and Malindi each November and March, feeding in small parties in and around floating seaweed beyond the reef. Parties off Kilifi in December 1973 were thought to be Red-necked Phalaropes *P. lobatus* (Cunningham-van Someren 1974), and a single *lobatus* was seen on the reef at Diani on 25 December 1966 (D.J. Pearson in litt.). Inland in eastern Africa *lobatus* far outnumbered the Grey Phalarope *P. fulicarius*, occurring annually in flocks of up to 30 at Lake Turkana (Hopson & Hopson 1975) and rather erratically in smaller numbers elsewhere (see Backhurst, Britton & Mann 1973, Ash & Ashford 1977).

On 1 March 1979 we found a freshly dead *lobatus* at Ras Iwetine (near Mombasa), washed up on the incoming tide. Like birds seen at sea during March, there was no sign of breeding plumage. Moults were suspended, with the eight innermost primaries renewed on both wings: weight 36.2 g, wing 110 mm. On 4 March 1979, while fishing off Diani, Miles Coverdale, Greagh Mausell and Sheelagh Mausell saw about 50 *lobatus* in small parties at ranges down to 3 m, noting their diagnostic needle-fine bills.

On present evidence it is reasonable to assume that most or all the phalaropes seen annually in coastal East Africa are *lobatus*, whereas *fulicarius* can be no more than a vagrant.

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SOMALI BEE-EATER *MEROPS REVOILII* IN TSAVO WEST During a recent trip through Tsavo West National Park, I was interested to observe a pair of Somali Bee-eaters within 400 m of the Tsavo River entrance gate to the National Park, to the west of the main Nairobi - Mombasa road.

This species is known to have extended its range to the south over the past decade and a half (Lack et al. in press). My own first Tsavo East observations of the bird date back to August 1966 when I noted its previously unrecorded presence in the Yatta gap, north of the Galana River and Lugard's Falls. Subsequent sightings have been made between

the Galana River and Voi (East African Bird Report 1977. Lack et al. in press).

The pair I watched were observed on the afternoon of 25 February 1979 and were engaged in aerial insect catching. As is typical of the species this pursuit was frequently conducted from different perches, often 20 - 30 m apart.

The increased extension of the Somali Bee-eater's range is of interest and appears to have followed elephant habitat destruction which has caused the opening up of previously more wooded areas. My own conjecture for these extensions had been linked to the prevailing drier conditions to which Tsavo had been subjected, and this appeared to have been borne out by observations of Somali Bee-eaters in drought conditions in the Buffalo Springs area of the Isiolo Game Reserve. However, with the past eighteen months of good rainfall, I tend to agree with L.S.C. Parker (pers. comm.) that, at least in Tsavo, the increase or extension of range of this species is more likely to be attributable to the recent opening up of suitable habitat than to the arid conditions.

REFERENCES

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- A.L. Archer, Wildlife Services Ltd., Box 30678, Nairobi.

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There is a recent unpublished record of two Somali Bee-eaters seen along the Tsavo River, 8 km south of the Mombasa road on 1 March 1976 by D.J. Pearson.

Ed.

RIVER WARBLERS IN SONG IN KENYA River Warblers *Locustella fluviatilis* occur annually on passage in late November/December in southeast Kenya. Numbers recorded away from Ngulia Lodge are small however, for this is an unobtrusive species of low thicket and herbage. Most birds have been located by their call, a persistent repeated 'chick-chick-chick'. Whilst watching a River Warbler emerging at the top of a small bush at Mito Andei on 9 December 1978 GJJ was surprised to hear and see it deliver a short burst of song, a jangling 'zi-zi-zi-zi-zi-zi . . .', identical to that with which he was acquainted on the Central European breeding grounds. The same song was heard by both of us from four sites along a few hundred metres of a small river valley immediately west of Mito Andei at 0900-1000 h on 12 December. We were eventually able to obtain a view of one of the birds singing from the bottom of a thick bush. Bursts of song lasted for several seconds, the basic syllable being repeated continuously, four to five times a second. At the end of December 1978 a few River Warblers were temporarily resident in the bush near Ngulia Lodge. At 0700-0900 h on 28 and 29